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NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is an indispensable element of life in society in the present-day world. The issue of neuro-linguistic programming appears in numerous areas –from job environment, advertising, relations with other people to internal thinking included. Thus, it is crucial to know the rules of speech communication.

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is an intentional modeling of sentences and words in sentences with the aim to initiate an expected reaction of a receiver on the basis of patterns of human way of thinking and perception. The process in question applies subconsciousness and the limited capabilities of a conscious mind to analyze the world [1]. This is a method that makes it possible to win any argument and makes people listen as if they were hypnotized.

The aim of the article is to present the concept of NLP and to present the methods of effective communication.

1. History of neuro-linguistic programming

Despite the fact that the techniques that constitute the basis of NLP had been applied for several years before the formation of the concept of NLP, neuro-linguistic programming has its roots in 1970s when John Gringer, a professor of linguistics in the University of California and Richard Bandler, a student of this University, started studying the techniques that were developed by three leading therapists to solve complex problems. The therapists were: Fritz Perls - a German psychiatrist who started a new therapist school called Gestalt, Virginia Satir- a family therapist, who dealt with complicated family problems and Milton Erickson – a world famous hypnotherapist. The objective of J. Grinder's and R. Bandier's research was to identify the methods applied by the three outstanding psychotherapists. They presented models of effective therapy that were applicable and teachable. Although the therapists that they followed

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[1] D. Kahneman, *Pułapki myślenia. O myśleniu szybkim i wolnym (Thinking, Fast and Slow),* translated by Piotr Szymczak, Media Rodzina, Poznań 2012, pp. 31-43.

dealt with completely different problems, they applied surprisingly similar principles. J. Grinder and R. Bandier analyzed them, improved and developed a model of neuro-linguistic programming that could be used in effective verbal and non-verbal communication, personal change, perception of reality and accelerated learning.

The study on NLP is still in progress and consists in the analysis of the ways how humans process what they hear, see and feel and how the human mind filters the external world through senses. NLP also investigates the response (both intentional and unintentional) of the human mind to the surrounding world and the results of the response[2].

2. Filters, i.e. the infinity of word meanings

Words may have numerous meanings and particularly some statements may mean different things to various people. Every individual assigns different meaning to words depending on the background, personality and many other factors. Words themselves do not convey particular emotions. When listening to a conversation of two people talking in a foreign language, the listener who does not know the language will hear clusters of meaningless sounds. Grades in school or university are another good example: grade "4" may make a schoolchild or a student either happy or disappointed. The difference consists in the filters through which a particular word passes.

In psychology, filters are constituted by certain frameworks that are responsible for the processing of information that comes from the outer world. They may be useful but they may also impede communication[3]. This is why it is important to ask the interlocutor what he/she has in mind when words are used that may have different meaning to either of the parties. Imprecisions result in arguments. Thus, it is worth asking one more question to avoid unpleasant consequences that are caused by different filters.

Empathy plays an important role in the communication process. This is the capacity to feel the emotions of other people, to look at the reality from their point of view and to understand their way of thinking. When transferring information to another person, one should be aware of the type of filters that it should go through. It is worth using filters that may be associated by the person in question with something pleasant.

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[2] R. Bandler, *Umysł, jak z niego wreszcie korzystać? (Using your Brain for a Change),* translated by Anna Dunajska, Centrum Kreowania Liderów S.A., Katowice 2007, p. 13.
[3] R. Bandler, *Umysł...*, op. cit., pp.33-35.

Filters (also referred to as paradigms) are important when making decisions and setting objectives. It should be emphasized that the receiver does not perceive things as they are but as he/she expects them to perceive[4]. Every human assigns individual meaning to the world. According to the cognitive approach[5], perception filters may be altered and adjusted so that they serve their owner. They determine to a great degree such significant issues as life objectives. The following two sentences from the sources that are distant in time describe it perfectly. The first one, written by J. O'Connor and J. Seymour in *NLP Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming,* states that if you go through the world in search of perfection - you will find perfection. If you look for problems - you will find problems[6]. The other one is H.Ford's reply to a question in his interview in *The Morning Union: „If you think you can or can't, you are right"*[7]. Thus, the conclusion from the two statements may be that humans are capable of deciding on their fate if they really want to.

3. Communication and rapport

According to numerous investigations on interpersonal communication, the content that is conveyed verbally constitutes a small fraction of communication. The research shows that 55% of the effect is reached by body language (gestures, eye contact, posture), 38% by the tone of voice and only 7% by the content[8]. Thus, it is important that words should be accompanied by an adequate posture and the tone of voice. It depends on these two factors whether simple *hello* is going to be a gracious greeting, a neutral sign of recognition or a threat. Humans communicate even when they do nothing. It is impossible not to communicate. Assuming that words are the message, the whole context is formed by gestures, tone and facial expression.

Natural communication takes place when people are in contact, that is when they talk to one another or when they look at one another. How can one recognize if there is rapport between the people engaged in a conversation? A person who does not know the principles of NLP and is observing strangers talking to one another will subconsciously feel their mutual attitude, whether they feel at ease with one another or if there is a problem to be discussed. Where does

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[4] S. R. Covey, *7 nawyków skutecznego działania,(The 7 Habits of Highly Effctive People)* translated by I. Majewska-Opiełka, Rebis, Poznań 2016, p. 19.

[5]. Cognitive approach is one of the latest trends in psychology, it concentrates in human thought and the ways of information processing by human brain.

[6] J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *NLP Wprowadzenie do programowania Neurolingwistycznego, (NLP Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming)* translated by B. Mizia, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 1996, p. 11.

[7] I. Corn, *The Morning Union (Springfield Union),* Springfield, Massachusetts, 22 August 1979, p.41, column 3.

[8] A. Mehrabian, H. Ferris, *Inference of Attitudes from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels,* „The Journal of Counselling Psychology", 1967, Vol. 31, pp. 248-252.

such knowledge come from? NLP uses the concepts of mirroring and matching that explain this phenomenon. People with rapport tend to replicate and harmonize their movements, gestures, postures and even the direction of looking. The bodies of interlocutors show if they do not have rapport. Effective negotiators can consciously take advantage of the potentials of non-verbal communication by adapting their tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, etc. to their interlocutors. However, one should keep in mind that the harmonization of movement and gestures etc. should not be an obvious and exaggerated imitation. In such case, the objective of the conversation will not be met unless the aim is to finish the conversation as soon as possible. In order to be effective, mirroring and matching must be subtle. The gestures can be mirrored by small head movements, the same pace of speech and the tone of voice. Breath synchronization is a more advanced method[9]. When there is a stronger rapport with another person, it is much easier to run a conversation and to introduce one's own arguments that will be treated as the truth by a subconscious mind of the interlocutor while the conscious mind will focus only on words.

The adjustment to the interlocutor leads to the development of a bridge through contact and respect[10]. One can imagine that saying *Cheer up! You will make it!* to a depressed person will not make him/her feel better. Although the intention of such a suggestion is positive, it may have a negative result and hurt the person. A much better solution is to harmonize with the person's posture and to use a calm tone of voice[11]. Only after the bridge has been built, the posture can be changed to a more optimistic and confident one. If a rapport is gained in an adequate way, the person who needs assistance will be more eager to follow the helping party. An efficient speaker will always remember about matching the other person.

4. The role of the word *NO*

This part will deal with the question of negations and the ways how the subconscious brain receives a sentence with the word *no*. What does this word really mean? *But d*on't worry, darling...* is an expression that everybody has heard from a partner at least once. What may the receiver of this message feel? Did the words *Do NOT worry* make the person take a deep breath

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[9] J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *NLP ...,* op. cit, p. 21.
[10] K. Hogan, *Psychologia perswazji,* (The Psychology of Persuasion), translated by Anna Dziuban, Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2010, pp. 48-50.
[11] J. La Valle i R. Bandler, *Alchemia manipulacji (Persuasion Engineering),* translated by Michał Dadan, Helion, Gliwice 2006, pp.16-18.

and listen calmly to the next sentence? The result may be quite the contrary. Why is that so? In order to understand this, one should consider the emotions behind the following three sentences:

- *Ladies and gentlemen, please, do not get stressed,*
- *Please, do not forget to clean the mess,*
- *Do not do it*

And now, being aware of the implications related to the word NO, one should compare the above sentences with the ones below:

- *Ladies and gentlemen, please keep calm,*
- *Clean it up, please,*
- *Stop doing it*

Human brain works in such a way that before negating anything, it has to perceive the meaning of a particular word – in this case it is WORRY[12]. As a result, the partner's message on the unconscious level was: *Do worry, darling*. It would be much better to say: *Darling, keep calm; I would like to tell you something*. For a conscious mind both sentences mean the same. However, the unconscious mind does not have to negate in the second sentence and receives a clear message: *Keep calm, darling*. This does not mean that the word *NO* should be avoided. A conscious and purposeful use of this word can recall desired images and emotions in the receiver's mind without any objections on his/her part[13].

One should mention here the so called polar reaction which can be seen in the parent-child relation. This is common among children and consists in frequent objecting even if the activity or thing is beneficial to them. There are two reasons for such a reaction. One is the polar reaction of older children and the other is the younger children's lack of capacity to object as they do not understand the word *no*. For them the sentence *You haven't cleaned the room* equals the sentence *You have cleaned the room* because on the subconscious level they can evoke only the meaning of *You have cleaned the room* and in the next step they cannot negate it; they do not understand negation.

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[12] K. Hogan, *Psychologia…,* op. cit., p. 23.
[13] J. La Valle i R. Bandler, *Alchemia…,* op. cit., pp.29-32.

5. *And, but, although* **– the words that change the meaning of everything**

Many people may not be aware of the fact that structures with such words as *and, but, although* can completely change the meaning of a sentence. Let's look at the following examples:

- *It is worth doing* **but** *I know that I will have to work hard on it;*
- *It is worth doing* **and** *I know that I will have to work hard on it;*
- *It is worth doing* **although** *I know that I will have to work hard on it;*

Which of these sentences sounds the most optimistic and motivating? The first sentence is not very optimistic, the second one is a matter-of-fact statement without any emotions while the third one puts aside the issue of hard work and concentrates on the value of the task. This is because ideas or experiences are connected with the specific words that draw listener's attention to different aspects of the statement. The action that aims at emphasizing different parts of a sentence is referred to as *framing*. A person who frequently uses the word *but* is going to negate positive aspects of events. The change from *but* to *and* and – first of all – to *although* will have a positive impact on his/her frame of mind. NLP does not only refer to the creation of the feelings of other people but also to the development of one's own attitude to the world and to the filtering of experience. In order to develop an optimistic attitude to other people and to improve one's own life quality, one should use words that create positive *frames*.

6. The skill of effective communication

Effective communication consists in the change of the listener's way of thinking that is beneficial to the message sender. In other words, the goal is to move interlocutors from the point where they are to the point where the other party wants them to be[14]. The sole use of linguistic and non-verbal structures is insufficient; there is however a principle – the most important of the ones that are applied in NLP – which may lead to a success. A complaint about an expensive coat may serve as an example. The customer is frustrated as the lining is torn away and goes to the shop to explain the situation. The shop assistant examines the faulty product and says with a smile: *Don't worry, the coat seems to be all right*. What is the probable reaction of the customer? Will he say embarrassed: *Yes, you are right. There is nothing wrong about it. I am sorry to make a complaint* ? Or will he say – even more angry – *You are quite wrong! It is evidently faulty!* The second reaction is more common. Why is that so? The answer seems

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[14] K. Hogan, *Psychologia…*, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

to be obvious and its consequences are extremely significant. The shop assistant rejected the customer's opinion and did not respond to the way the customer saw the problem. This is a serious fundamental mistake that is made by many people who unconsciously make it impossible to build "a bridge", i.e. to find an agreement.

If the shop assistant was aware of the principle, the reply would be: *Yes, sir. I understand that you have bought an expensive coat in our shop and after a few days the problem with the lining occurred, which is obviously upsetting. The shop manager and I will do our best to solve the issue.* In this case, the shop assistant confirmed the situation, made it clear that he noticed and understood the customer's frustration and finally offered some solution. In a polite way he made the customer think rather about the solution offered by the shop than the complaint.

The principle that concerns the above example is adequately commented by A.Batko: *If you really want to communicate effectively, always start with talking about the experience, problems and feelings of your interlocutor; and only after that start suggesting ideas, feelings or reactions!* [15].

The art of persuasion is the basis for an effective use of any influence technique. One should start with the feelings of the interlocutor and then develop a "bridge".

7. The impact of NLP techniques on customer service satisfaction – results of the author's survey

For the purpose of the article a survey was conducted whose objective was to show the impact of NLP techniques on customer service satisfaction on the basis of customer complaints. In the survey, respondents – having read a short conversation between a shop assistant and a dissatisfied customer that is making a complaint in clothing shop X – assessed the customer service and the shop in question. The research tool was a survey questionnaire. The survey was anonymous; it used a parallel method, involved 100 respondents aged 18+ and was conducted in May 2019. The respondents were divided into two groups: a control group which obtained a script of the above mentioned dialogue between a shop assistant that did not use NLP techniques and the customer, and the other one where the shop assistant applied NLP techniques. Figure 1 presents the replies (in per cent) of the group under research, while Figure 2 shows the replies (in per cent) in the control group.

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[15] A. Batko, *Sztuka perswazji, czyli język wpływu i manipulacji,* Helion, Gliwice 2005, p. 59.

Figure 1. Quantitative structure of replies to the question regarding customer service satisfaction of Shop X in the group under investigation
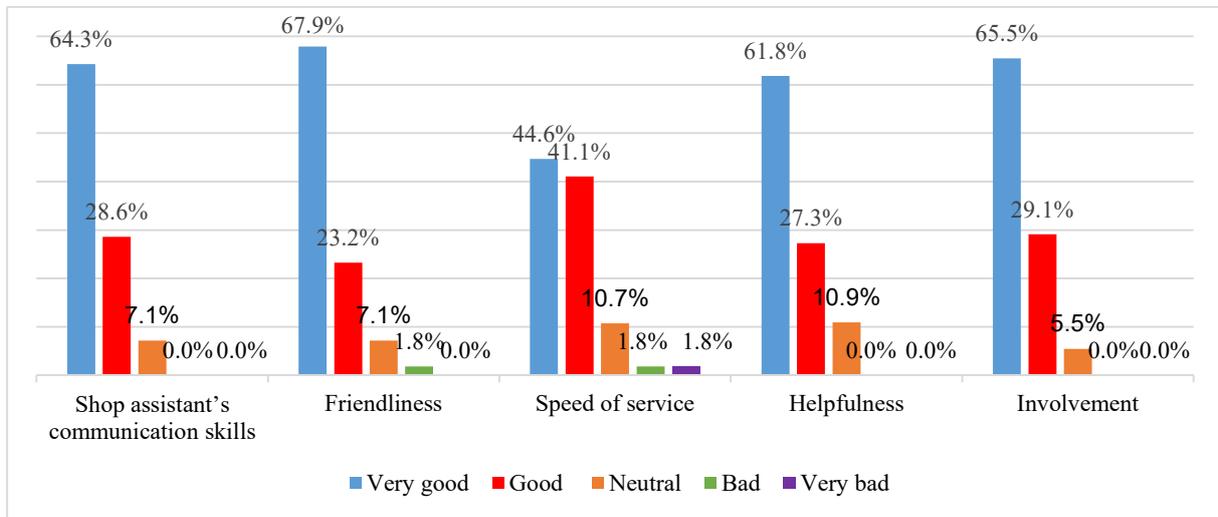
Source: Author's survey and calculations.

Figure 2. Quantitative structure of replies to the question regarding customer service satisfaction of Shop X in the control group
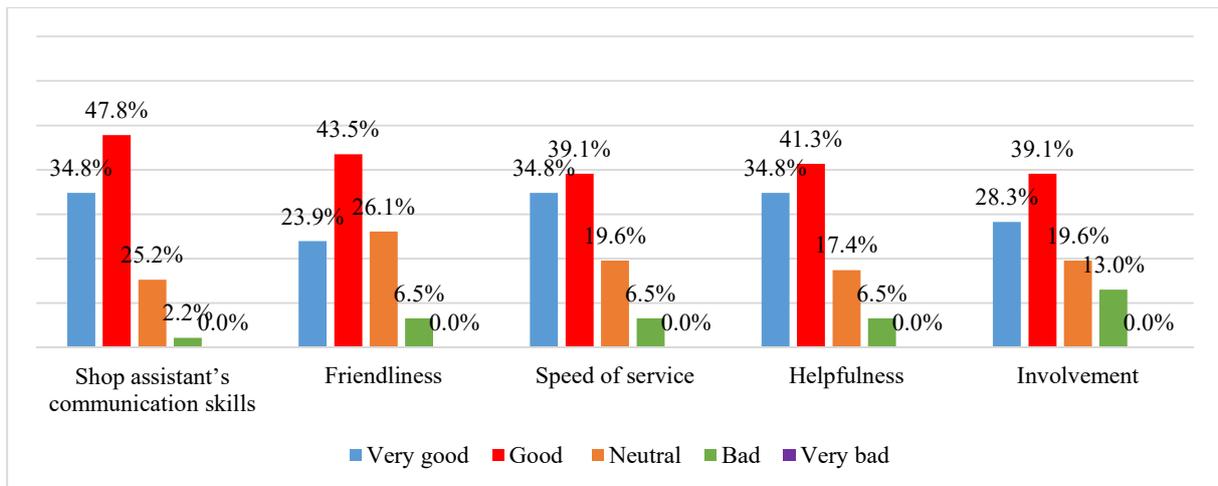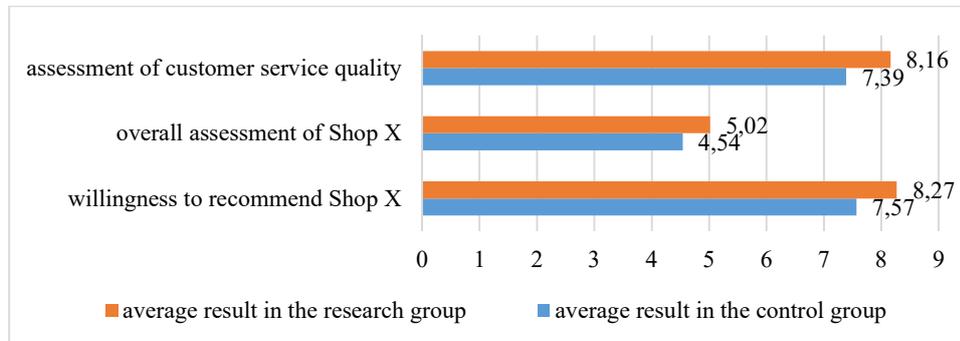

Source: Author's survey and calculations.

It is visible that the highest grade (very good) appears significantly more often in the group where the dialogue included NLP techniques, while grades below *neutral* (bad, very bad) are more common in the group where NLP techniques were not applied. These grades result in further important consequences such as a positive/negative impact both on the overall assessment of the customer service quality and the overall assessment of the shop, which eventually affects its image. One should keep in mind that the respondents did not know anything else about the shop apart from the presented conversation. However, this was enough

for the average grading to be higher by almost one point (in the scale range 1-10) in every issue that was evaluated in the survey. The results are given in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The impact of NLP on the overall assessment of Shop X

Source: Author's survey and calculations.

It should be emphasized that despite a seemingly insignificant difference between NLP-based customer service quality and the quality of standard procedures, the survey showed that it is worth investing in soft skills training of customer service staff as NLP techniques influence an overall company's image. NLP is an extremely important factor in the development of a positive image and bond between a company and its customers.

Conclusions

NLP is a technique that improves interpersonal communication processes, both in private lives, within companies and their contacts with the environment. The application of NLP may make statements more precise. According to the author's survey, the use of NLP does not only have an impact on customers' behavior but it also helps develop a rapport with a company, which is a factor that influences their opinion about it.

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Abstract

The article concerns Neuro-Linguistic Programming. It presents the history of NLP and the opportunities that this technique provides. It describes the way the human brain receives and processes information. It also presents the fundamentals of effective communication and on the basis of the author's survey it shows the impact of the application of NLP on customer satisfaction with a service and, consequently, the opinion about the service provider.

Key words

Neuro-linguistic programming, NLP, psychology, communication, manipulation, influencing.